

Student Satisfaction as a Measure of Quality Library Services Provided by the University of Zambia

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Abstract

The study conducted at the University of Zambia utilized students' perceptions towards the quality of students' services as proxy in the quality assessment of the institution's library services. Data for the study was collected by the use of a 5-pointer Likert scale and questionnaire survey involving 189 students. The collected data was analyzed using the SERVQUAL model for quality assessment. Descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative responses were applied to the collected data. The results showed that 65% students felt that the main library lacked up-to-date study and research materials. The students were not satisfied with the quality of sanitation and effectiveness of staff towards responding to their queries. A lack of adequate orientation of the library services particularly involving use of e-resources as well as access was frequently cited as a constraint to access of study materials. On the other hand, the librarians faced challenges of inadequate study space, lack of personal responsibility by students to institutional property, inadequate funding to the department, bureaucratic inefficiency and insecurity in case of fire breakouts. Overall, it was concluded that students perceived the library services they received from The University of Zambia as of low quality. This implied a lack of satisfaction in the quality of study materials at their disposal. This status quo could directly impact on their academic performance.

Keywords: Student Welfare Services, Tangibles, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Reliability

1. Introduction

Zambia has experienced increased economic growth in recent years (GRZ, 2011). This has translated in the emergence of increased numbers of public and private universities competing for the same clients-students. The resultant competitive environment has made university education become a major industry both for the profit-making privately owned universities and the citizen-oriented public universities. On the other hand, university education is considered an investment by the sponsoring parties, which could either be parents sponsoring children or organizations providing scholarships and bursaries. The academic institutions in the country usually offer similar courses to students and the only differentiating factor is the environment under which this education is conducted. This fact makes the quality of student welfare services (SWS) provided by the universities becoming of cardinal concern to many stakeholders particularly the students and the sponsoring institutions. This is so because SWS are the major distinguishing factor among universities and hence forms the basis for attracting and retaining students. In any aspiring High Performance Organization (HPO), quality assurance in an institution starts with investment in the training of staff so as to improve performance as well as create an enabling environment for effective coordination, cooperation, compassion and empathy (Hasan et. al., 2008). Attention should also be given to identifying the dynamic needs of the clients for purposes of student satisfaction. Students are the major clients of academic institutions, and in this study, the two have been used interchangeably. Over the last two decades, quality assurance in university education and other higher institutions of learning in Zambia has been emphasized (GRZ, 1996). Quality assessment is a major contributing factor to achieving this assurance. This is done to ensure academic institutions meet clients' expectations by providing good quality SWS. This study utilized the SERVQUAL model for quality assessment to determine levels of students' satisfaction with the library services provided at the highest and biggest institution of learning in Zambia, the University of Zambia (UNZA).

Since its establishment in 1966, UNZA has operated under the motto of "Service with Excellence" and has strived to "function in a supportive and enabling environment" (MOE, 1996:98). However, recently the institution has been the centre of verbal jabs from the media as well as the students. The reasons for the frenzy have usually been associated with a perceived lack of satisfaction in one or more SWS offered by the institution (ZWD, 2014a; 2014b). The SWS, which have already caused frenzy among UNZA students include, registration procedures, medical facilities, state of accommodation as well as modes of payment of fees. However, the perceptions of students with regard to the arguably most important SWS to their academic wellbeing- quality of library services provided by UNZA, are scantily known as students have hardly caused frenzy over library services.

On the other hand, UNZA has progressively increased student enrolments overtime with no counter expansion in structures to cater for the welfare of the increased number of students (UNZA, 2012). This lack of

cohesion between student enrolments and the magnitude of the student library functional structures are a potential compromise to quality service provision. This status quo has necessitated the need for a study that would reveal the state in quality of library services provided by the University of Zambia as well as establish the levels of student satisfaction by establishing their perceptions towards the quality of library services provided by the institution.

The objectives of this study were twofold; i) to investigate the perceptions of students towards the quality of library services at UNZA; and ii) to assess the levels of students satisfaction towards library services based on their perceptions.

1.1 Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the SERVQUAL model which is a Gaps Model of Service Quality. The framework was applied to assessing the quality of library services by measuring student satisfaction levels in light of the dimensions of service quality through student expectations and perceptions. The SERVQUAL model was developed by Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1988). It is based on a generic questionnaire which is designed to cover five broad aspects of service quality:

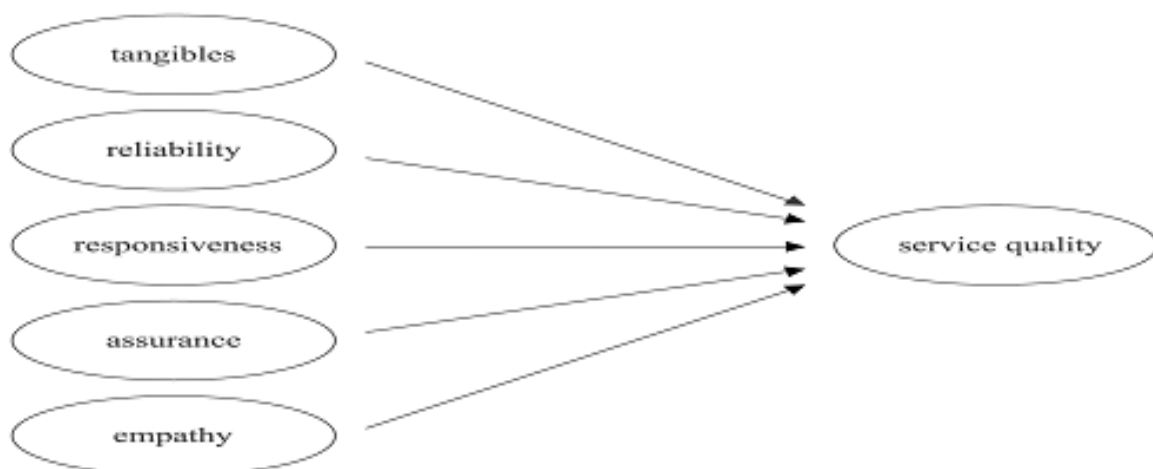


Fig 1. Model for assessing service quality (SERVQUAL) (Parasunaman *et al.*, 1988).

The SERVQUAL framework is a useful tool in highlighting specific difficulties and ensuring a high quality of service both by management at institutions and students in all situations.

1.1.1 Reasons for Utilization of the SERVQUAL Model

Firstly, the SERVQUAL model has been designed to be applicable across a broad spectrum of services and it provides a basic skeleton for assessment through its expectations and perceptions format, which can be adapted or supplemented to fit the characteristics of specific research needs of a particular organization such as the University of Zambia. Secondly, due to its five broad dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, the SERVQUAL model fits well with the research problem and consistently supports the provision of accurate answers to the research questions. This is so since the study aims at diagnosing the problem and ascertaining possible university management strategies for enhancement of the quality of library services.

1.1.2 Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction in university education has a positive impact on student motivation, student retention, and recruiting efforts. Client satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from experiencing a service encounter and comparing that encounter with what was expected (Oliver, 1980). Students generally form their expectations through their previous education experiences, while searching information about the institution, observing what is provided at other academic institutions and discussing with other people who have been studying there. Moreover, student satisfaction is continuously shaped by repeated experiences in the learning environment (Elliott and Shin, 2002). Therefore, care should be given to identify learner changing needs and what is important to students.

1.1.3 The Concept of Service Quality

The notion of quality generally refers to excellence in respect of a particular characteristic that is thought to be valuable. Quality can thus imply efficiency in meeting set goals, relevance to human and excellence to human betterment (OALD, 2004). This means that for a service to be appreciated, it must be rooted in a society and culture that students can comprehend and not alien or foreign. Kotler (1994) defines quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Service quality, therefore, is a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality

dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding, knowing the customers and Tangibles (Parasuraman et. al., 1985). This is because students do not perceive quality in a one-dimensional way but rather judge quality based on multiple factors relevant to the context of service.

1.1.4 Library Services

In all universities, the quality of teaching is critical to student satisfaction, and is closely associated with the provision of student services. The Library Service plays a vital role in the circulation of information material and provision of relevant materials by means of books, journals, magazines, or newspapers to lecturers and students (Kochhar, 1984).

1.1.5 Library Service Provision at the University of Zambia

The main library at UNZA Great East Road Campus is a multifunctional facility. It archives data, provides literature in different forms, such as hard copies (books, journals, newspapers, magazines), and soft copies through its subscription to online libraries, for example, Wiley, Springer and Amazon. It also provides data bases through its e-resources which include e-journals provided by Agora, Jstor, Oxford Journals (Oup), Sage Online Journals, Hinarii, inter alia. Besides, UNZA Main Library plays a vital role in helping students to do online research by providing periodical lessons to newly admitted students.

2. Methodology

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were integrated in order to allow the researchers to triangulate the data that was collected. Cohen et al. (2007) support the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in research to enable researchers to cross-check research findings.

2.1 Data Collection

Several methods of collecting data were employed. These included desk research, semi-structured and key informant interviews and observations.

2.2 Sampling

The University of Zambia was purposively selected for this study as it is the largest university in Zambia and has been the oldest institution of higher learning in the country since independence.

A total of 189 students was sampled to help assess the perceptions of students towards the quality of library services students received from UNZA. Selection of the sample was done purposively. This figure was large enough to establish students' satisfaction towards SWS. This is because the researchers were administering semi-structured interviews which enabled probing in case of responses not being satisfactory. Furthermore, this method of data collection made it possible for the researchers to reach a saturation point at which no new information was being generated from the respondent. Furthermore, the sample size was tested under the g-power statistical package to determine its viability and the results showed the sample would generate statistically representative non-biased data. The researcher targeted student library users and these were interviewed when they were either entering the library or leaving the library. The total student library users were taken to be the total for full-time and parallel students (16, 290) who were available on campus during the period of data collection in 2014.

2.3 Key Informant Interviews

A total of six key informants were interviewed on their perceptions of library services provided by UNZA, strategies for improving the situation and challenges faced in provision of library services. The key informants also provided data on management strategies in place to ensure transformation of UNZA into an HPO.

2.4 Semi-Structured Interviews and Survey Questionnaire

Data on students' perceptions towards the quality of library services provided by UNZA was collected through interviews by the use of semi-structured interview schedules prepared for student respondents. Furthermore, a survey questionnaire was formulated by the use of a 5-pointer Likert scale to collect information on students' expectations of the library services provided as well as rate their perceptions of their ideal library services. This questionnaire survey was designed based on the original 22-item instrument for assessing client perceptions of service quality described by Berry et.al (1988). The questionnaire was structured and each service quality attribute was rated using the five pointer Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.5 Observations

Data on the physical aspects of the UNZA main library was collected largely by observation. The physical aspects observed in the library inter-alia included tangibles such as availability of study materials, cleanliness and sanitation in the study area as well as the toilets and ventilation. Furthermore, assertions about the library

made by the respondents were groundtruthed by observation.

2.6 Desk Studies

Desk research was conducted to gain a better understanding of the theoretical perspectives of the study. The use of the SERVQUAL theoretical framework as well as studies which have applied the framework were reviewed to gauge its applicability to the study at hand.

2.7 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was employed to analyze quantitative data using Microsoft 2010 and results were presented either as percentages, tables or graphs. Results for respondents', expectations and perceptions towards different aspects of service quality were calculated and the results presented as either tables, or graphs. Qualitative information from the semi-structured interviews with students and the key informants was analyzed by summarizing the data into key themes, and noting the frequency with which each theme appeared.

3. Results

The study utilized 189 students as respondents from UNZA Main Campus of which 47% were female while 53% were males. Fewer postgraduate students (15%) were interviewed compared to undergraduates (85%). This could have been due to the already low proportions of postgraduate students in comparison to undergraduates. Hence there were more undergraduates using the library for each postgraduate student library user.

3.1 Students' Perceptions on the Quality of Library Services provided at UNZA

The students' perceptions are presented in the light of five dimensions of service quality, namely; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

3.1.1 Tangibility

Tangibility was assessed by the use of the attribute 'sanitation in the main library'. Sanitation in the library included ventilation, tidiness of bookshelves, cleanliness of toilets and floors in the library. A total of 189 students were interviewed as regards to their perceptions of sanitation in the Main Library at UNZA. Of the total interviewed, 86% (163) expected to find good sanitation against 8% (15) who expected poor sanitation while 5% (11) were not sure whether or not there would be good sanitation. After using the library, the findings show a drastic change in their perceptions. That is, 82% (155) perceived poor sanitation in the main library while only 15% (29) felt the library had good sanitation (Figure 2a).

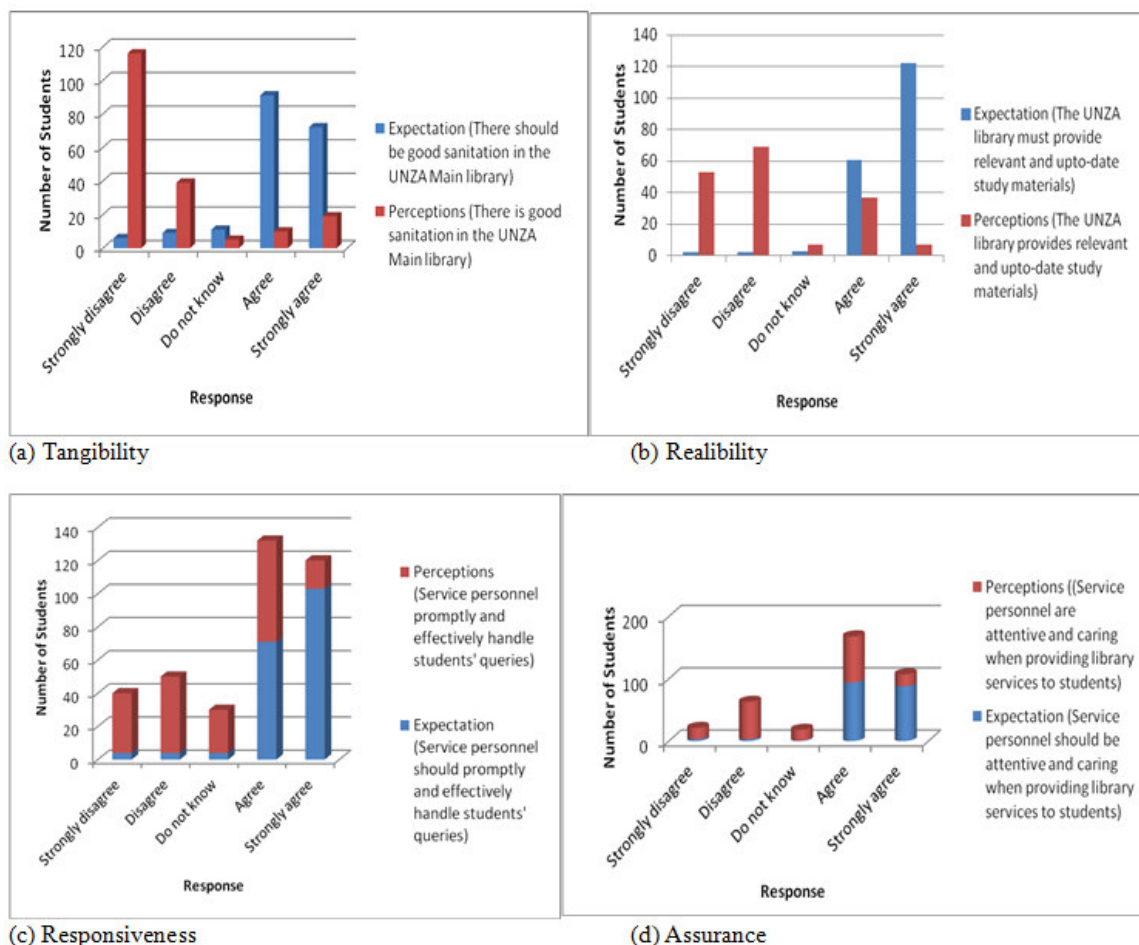


Fig 2. Students' perceptions and expectations of (a) Sanitation in the UNZA Main Library (b) Study and Research Materials (c) Promptness of Personnel in Handling Students' Queries, and (d) Personnel's Attitudes in the UNZA Main Library

3.1.2 Reliability

This dimension of service quality was assessed using the attribute of 'availability of up-to-date study materials' in the Main Library at UNZA. A total of 189 respondents were asked to state if the main library at UNZA was reliable enough in their provision of relevant up-to-date study and research materials. The responses show that 96 (51%) students expected availability of such materials. However, after their repeated use of the UNZA library services, 122 (65%) did not feel the library provided relevant up-to-date study materials while 44 (23%) felt that UNZA Main Library provided the materials they needed for their study (Figure 2b).

3.1.3 Responsiveness

With regard to the dimension of responsiveness of the library services provided at UNZA main Campus, respondents were asked to state their perceptions of the library service personnel's ability to attend to students' queries promptly (Figure 2c). Of the total number of respondents sampled, 92% (174) expected quick and efficient service before their first use of the library. However, after their encounter with the library service personnel, 43% (82) felt the personnel were not prompt as compared to 41% (78) who felt the personnel were prompt and efficient in handling students' queries. Only 14% (26) did not know.

3.1.4 Assurance

In order to assess the capacity of UNZA Main Library's ability to inspire trust, the dimension of assurance as a service quality was used. The respondents were asked to state whether the service personnel were attentive and caring when serving students (Figure 2d). The results on assurance show that out of the 189 respondents interviewed, 96 (51%) were confident that attentiveness and care would be shown to them by UNZA library personnel while utilizing the library services at UNZA. However, after their encounter with the library service personnel, 49 (26%) felt that the personnel inspired trust while only 42 (22%) felt that the personnel were neither attentive nor caring when serving them.

3.1.5 Empathy

In order to find out the views of students towards the quality of library services, it was necessary to investigate the care and personalized attention UNZA Main Library gave to students through its personnel. This represented

the service quality dimension of empathy. Therefore, respondents were asked to state if the library personnel exhibited personal care and kindness towards students. The responses show that 32% (60) felt the personnel was kind and polite to them, 57% (108) perceived lack of empathy among the service personnel while 11% (20) were not sure whether or not good relations between the library personnel and students at UNZA existed (Figure 3).

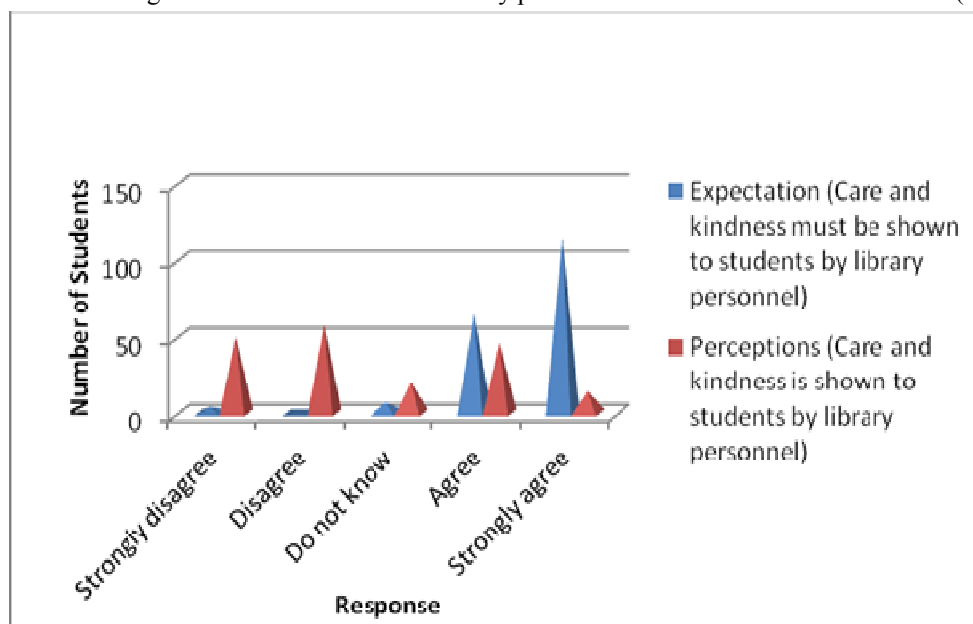


Fig 3. Students' Perceptions and Expectations of Empathy among UNZA Library Personnel

3.2 Challenges Encountered By UNZA in the Provision of Quality Student Welfare Services

Key informants from UNZA management, UNZA Library and Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) were asked to state the challenges they encountered in ensuring that quality library services were provided at UNZA Great East Road Campus (Table 1).

Table 1. Challenges Faced in the Provision of Quality Library Services at UNZA

Key Informants	Challenges
MHE	1. Inadequate funding to the institution
	2. Inadequate staff to conduct routine inspections
UNZA Management and UNZA Library	3. Inadequate funding to the department
	4. Bureaucratic inefficiency
	5. Insecurity in case of fire breakouts i.e. the library has no fire hydrants, inadequate fire extinguishers and no fire escape routes
	6. Inadequate study space
	7. Not enough computers
	8. Lack of expansion space
	9. Inadequate staff
	10. Need for regular staff training

4. Discussion

The study of students' perceptions of different welfare services offered by UNZA was a quality assessment of the levels of satisfaction of students' towards their research and study environment while on campus. In essence, the study attempted to answer the following question; Are students satisfied with the library services offered at UNZA? A number of attributes in service quality were used to guide students' responses such as the tangibility or physical appearance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy in the provision of library infrastructure and services. The discussion will follow these attributes studied.

4.1 Sanitation of UNZA Main Library

The general sanitation of the main library was used as proxy to determine how students perceived the quality of library services and in this case 'sanitation' of the main library entails cleanness of toilets, dust on book shelves, ventilation as well as cleanness and tidiness of library floors. Majority students (82% or 155) were not satisfied with the sanitation of the main library. This is a worry since students spend a lot of time in the library doing their

study and research. Poor sanitation in the library is not only a hazard to their academic prowess but also a health hazard. Even more worrying is the lack of fire exit points and assembly points as well as hydrants in the library. This means that in the case of a fire breakout, there is a reduced chance of library users surviving the inferno. This is a situation requiring immediate attention.

4.2 Reliability of UNZA Main Library

The question of UNZA main library's reliability is in essence a question of the capability of the library to provide relevant up to date study materials. The majority of the students (122 or 65%) did not feel the library provided them with relevant up-to-date materials. Ground-truthing by the researchers revealed existence of a lot of 'old' literature and a few latest literatures in print form. Besides, despite the UNZA Main Library's e-resources being well stocked with lots of new literature, most of these e-resources were not available to students. Access to these e-resources is available to students in theory but restricted in practice. Some of these e-resources are protected by passwords which are given to lecturers but are not usually given to students. In fact, the students interviewed were not even aware of the existence of these e-resources let alone have access to the passwords. This is a worrying status quo since UNZA is an academic institution of which provision and availability of study materials is one of its core-business. If the students are not satisfied in this case, then the institution needs to make major changes to arrest the situation. Beside availability, training of students in access and use of these e-resources ought to be done regularly.

4.3 Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy of UNZA Library Personnel

When asked whether or not they perceived UNZA library personnel to have handled their queries promptly; nearly half of the students felt that the personnel were prompt and a similar number felt the opposite. Similar results were obtained from assessments of assurance and empathy. Yet again, for an institution engaged in competition with several other universities in quality service provision, these numbers do not inspire confidence.

4.4 Challenges of Quality Library Service Provision at UNZA

The established challenges of quality service provision by MHE, UNZA Library and UNZA Management were similar to many challenges faced by majority public institutions with the common one being inadequate funding. UNZA's challenges of sanitation, vandalism and security, however, could be addressed by collective and individual efforts from both students and management to ensure academic and social development by learning in a conducive environment (Chakanika, 1989).

Over all, UNZA's main challenges of bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate computers, inadequate staff, irregular staff training, inadequate study space, irregular inspection of campus premises and over-enrolments could be addressed with improved institutional management. However, it requires not only strategy (UNZA, 2012) which UNZA has already set in place but also thriving towards being a High Performance Organization (HPO) (Pickering et al., 2013). Achieving the status of HPO would entail collective responsibility of all parties involved, *vis-a-vis* management, employees and students.

4.5 Students' Expectations and Perceptions

The findings of this study assert in accord with Parasuraman (1985) whose view is that service quality is a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, security, understanding and tangibles. Indeed, students did not perceive quality in a one-dimensional way but rather judged the quality of library services based on multiple factors such as sanitation of the study environment, security systems, responsiveness and empathy of service personnel.

An emerging trend from all the graphs in 'the findings' is that of students having high expectations for the quality of library services offered by UNZA and yet their perceptions drastically changed upon their encountering them. The decrease in levels of student satisfaction at UNZA to dimensions and attributes of service quality entails low service delivery (Table 2).

Table 2: Levels of Student Satisfaction towards the Quality of Library Services Provided By UNZA

Dimension of Service Quality	Attribute of Service Quality	Expectation	Perception	Student Satisfaction
Tangibility	Sanitation in the main library	High	Low	Low
Reliability	Provision of relevant up to date study and research material	High	Low	Low
Responsiveness	Library personnel's ability to attend to students' queries promptly	High	Moderate	Moderate
Assurance	Service personnel's attentiveness and care provided to students	High	Moderate	Moderate
Empathy	Personal care and kindness showed to students	High	Low	Low

Generally, students' perceptions against expectations were low in nearly all cases as indicated by Table 2. This implies that students were not satisfied with most of the library services provided by UNZA. The expectations were assessed for students before they came to UNZA and these were usually high while their perceptions after coming to the institution became low. For instance, perceived poor sanitation in main library at UNZA by its clients is indicative of low quality library provision which may potentially impact on their academic performance (Kotler, 1994). Therefore, it can be stipulated that the status quo of Zambia's biggest and highest institution of learning (UNZA)'s library services leaves much to be desired. Contrary to the notion of service quality, which refers to excellence in respect of a particular characteristic that is thought to be valuable (Hawes and Stephens: 1990), UNZA in essence was letting the students down *per se*.

4. Conclusion

The study had investigated the quality of library services provided by UNZA in the context of student perceptions. Quality of library services meant proper sanitation in the library, proper ventilation, aeration and general safety from potential hazards such as fire. These service attributes were measured in the light of the five measures of service quality (Parasuraman, 1988) which are tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy. The study revealed that besides empathy provided by the UNZA Main Library service personnel, students were not satisfied with the library services offered by the institution. Even though UNZA is an institution of higher learning and research, students felt the material in the library was mostly outdated and required major refurbishment. Overall, the students were not satisfied with the welfare services offered by the institution hence the need for UNZA management to ensure their clients got satisfied amidst competition provided by the other available institutions of higher learning.

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